

**Youth Empowerment as a Tool for Community Change:
A Program Plan and Evaluation Plan for Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!)**

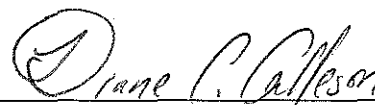
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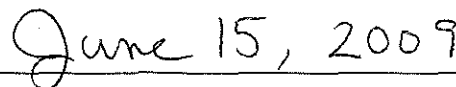
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I. Abstract

Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!) is a non-profit organization established on the premise that youth can serve a unique role in their communities as advocates for positive change both on the community and policy level. YES! was formed after the significant success of an organization that preceded it, Question Why (?Y), which challenges youth to speak out against tobacco use in their communities. Founders of Question Why observed youth taking initiative in their communities on issues that were important to them, and saw downstream positive effects mounting. The youth involved in Question Why became more confident, more informed, and more excited to be involved in change. In short, they were empowered by acting towards a cause in which they believed.

Under this premise, YES! was founded and has its primary office in Durham, North Carolina. Previous funding from Question Why has kept YES! afloat thus far, but YES! is now establishing itself as a free-standing, self-sufficient non-profit. This program plan will serve as a tool for re-enforcing the foundation of YES!, as well as making an evaluation plan to facilitate future fund procurement.

First, through a mini-literature review, I will make a case for why there is a niche to be filled by unique programs like YES! Next, the program plan section will provide many of the details for the planning process and implementation for YES!, including an explanation of how the youth empowerment theory influences YES!. I will include a description of the program context, resources, funding and the socio-political environment surrounding the idea and implementation of youth empowerment programs

in communities. I will also outline the goals and short- and long-term objectives of the plan for YES! An evaluation plan is also provided. The initial evaluation of YES! will assess the extent to which the short term goals and objectives of the program plan have been met while also exploring if and how these were met, specifically during the planning process and program implementation phase. A logic model will presented with. Inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes evaluated.

II. Introduction

Efforts towards community change have always had to overcome many barriers. First, an issue worthy of advocacy for change must be chosen, then people must be recruited as bearers of the message, and, finally, an effective method of message dissemination must be agreed upon. Often and most importantly, funding must be procured.

The idea that youth should be involved in efforts to positively change community practice and policy is not a new one. Youth have proven time and again that they have the power of advocacy and more energy than most to push their agenda¹. However, youth and their voices often remain somewhat marginalized in community decision-making processes, sometimes making youth less likely to speak up again.

Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!) is a non-profit organization established on the premise that youth can serve a unique role in their communities as advocates for positive change both on the community and policy level. YES! was formed after the significant success of an organization that preceded it, Question Why (?Y), which challenges youth to speak out against tobacco use in their communities. Founders of Question Why observed youth taking initiative in their communities on issues that were important to them, and saw downstream positive effects mounting afterwards.. The youth involved in Question Why became more confident, more informed, and more excited to be involved in change. In short, they were empowered by acting towards a cause in which they believed.

The Question Why founders believe that one of the essential ingredients in the program that made it successful was independent of the issue of tobacco cessation. Rather, success was nested in a crucially important concept that transcends cause: youth empowerment. The founders of Question Why and Youth Empowered Solutions believe that empowered youth can accomplish much that others cannot in their communities and that ultimately their efforts and energy both the youth and the communities in which they serve and the adults who support and work with the youth.

Under this premise YES! was founded. Previous funding from Question Why has kept YES! afloat thus far, but YES! must now establish itself as a free-standing, self-sufficient non-profit. This program plan will serve as a tool for re-enforcing the foundation of YES! as well as making an evaluation plan to facilitate future fund procurement and improving program structure.

As YES! expands to be its own non-profit organization and to include more programs that involve youth empowerment, it needs an over-arching model for how youth working with youth works effectively, regardless of the issue for which the youth advocate for change. YES! wants to capture successes resulting from youth empowerment based not only on theory, but the concrete successes of their youth in their communities

A program plan and evaluation for YES! is an ideal mechanism by which to outline, apply, and eventually measure the effect of the public health principles inherent in youth empowerment as YES! defines them. The current trend of evidence based medicine,

which relies on quantifiable results as evidence of a program's "effectiveness," has been adopted by programs that provide grant monies for public health programs (like YES!) all over the world. Thus, program planning coupled with an evaluation plan in order to achieve such results has become the norm². To this end, a program plan and an evaluation plan will significantly benefit YES!

However, this program plan and evaluation will not only focus on quantitative results. Just as important are those qualitative measures which give the leaders of the organization a place to launch many improvement efforts. Thus, this program plan and evaluation plan will focus on goals and objectives that have both qualitative and quantitative measures so that it can maximally help YES! to become an independent, self-sufficient non-profit in the near future.

This evaluation of YES! will assess the extent to which the goal and short term objectives of the program plan have been met while also exploring the ways by which results can be produced. Specifically, the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes of the logic model will be evaluated. The long term objective of the YES! program is to increase the use of youth empowerment as a tool for community change.

Creating this program plan and evaluation for YES! – can serve as a template for many different groups involving youth empowerment and advocacy.

III. Rationale: Why we need a program like YES!

In this section I will make an argument for why there is a place in our communities for a program like YES!. I will first discuss youth empowerment as part of the socio/medical/gray literature and how it has been developed. After a brief systematic review of the literature on Youth Empowerment in March 2009, I will then explain why YES! has all the elements necessary to be a successful Youth Empowerment organization.

Introduction to Youth Empowerment Theory

Empowerment theory is a conceptual framework for developing interventions that promotes healthy lifestyles among adolescents^{3,4}. This theory proposes that positive youth development emerges through promotion of greater participation/involvement by youth in the public affairs of their community, and that the community also benefits from youth involvement. Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!), embraces this definition of empowerment and hopes to apply it to improve the lifestyles of youth in a variety of arenas varying from tobacco control to promoting physical activity to many other aspects pertinent to a healthy lifestyle.

The unique concept of youth empowerment rests on two assumptions: 1) Youth are positively impacted by being involved in their communities and being an integral part of organizations and 2) the organizations and the communities also benefit from the work of the youth. Therefore, this literature review will examine existing evidence related to these two premises. Finally, I will review a few programs/organizations with similar

Empowerment strategies, to review their successes and failures to help successfully shape the program plan and evaluation for YES!

Mini Systematic Review of the Literature on Youth Empowerment:

Search Strategy

In order to produce a literature review on the effectiveness of Youth Empowerment efforts, several databases were used. Data bases most commonly utilized published in the social sciences included ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and ISI Web of knowledge (all suggested by the HSL Librarian). MedLine was not effective for finding exhaustive research published in this field. , Additionally, I used “gray” (unpublished) literature that was given to me by YES! as well as literature uncovered by previous literature reviews done by Question Why. During this search, I found that the term “youth empowerment” has several synonymous keywords when searching databases, including but not limited to: youth engagement, youth-supported change, youth Infusion, youth Governance, and youth-decision making. The resources from this search combined to form a sufficient body of literature to create this review. A more detailed research strategy is outlined in each section.

Evidence that Youth Benefit from Community Involvement

To search for evidence that youth benefit from leadership in community involvement and community advocacy, I began by searching databases including ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and ISI Web of knowledge. In ERIC, the largest and broadest database of the three, I began by using the search strategy: “Youth AND Empowerment” which yielded

an unmanageable number of articles. However, I was able to identify search terms within the database and subsequently narrowed my search to “Youth Empowerment” AND Youth Programs AND Leaders AND Community Development”, which yielded 71 articles. After a brief review of several abstracts, I narrowed my search by eliminating biomedical research, which yielded 55 articles. I reviewed these abstracts by hand, finding one review (Walker, 2007) that evaluated the effect of youth involvement on organizations. This review did not directly address how youth are affected, but did cite some studies that did address these effects (Holden 2004, Zeldin 2006, Mitra 2004, and Chekoway 2004). I found the same articles within the original 55 articles, and again when I searched Academic Search Premier database with similar parameters. Finally, I searched the ISI Web of Knowledge database with similar parameters and Walker, Holden, and Mitra also came up in this search.

Holden (2004)⁵ states that the proposed outcomes of individual participation in most youth empowerment models is that youth will “attain specific skills (e.g., assertiveness, advocacy), attitudes (e.g., domain-specific self-efficacy, perceived sociopolitical control, participatory competence), and knowledge of relevant resources.” To test whether this is actually the case, he attempts to *quantify* the impact by using a survey instrument designed to obtain data on these key components of empowerment as a result of participation in various tobacco-control groups. To do this, he surveyed youth who were involved in 17 youth-led tobacco cessation initiatives in 17 states across the U.S. The surveys were mailed to the adult leader of each group, with instructions to give them to youth leaders with a variety of levels of involvement. The survey focused on six

components of “success,” and included both “intrapersonal” and “interactional” components. Qualitative and quantitative analyses (two sets of regression models controlling for age, race/ethnicity, and gender) were conducted. Using this model, Holden found that participation by youth in the tobacco-cessation groups was associated with increased confidence, perceived sociopolitical control, and participatory confidence as well as an increased knowledge of resources, assertiveness, and advocacy as compared to those who did not participate. Additionally, the level of participation by youth was directly proportional to the same measures.

Zeldin, O’Connor, and Camino (2006)⁶ found that when youth are involved as decision-makers and “change agents in the inquiry process” within organizations, the youth benefit. The research group reviewed more than two dozen youth research and evaluation projects and found that “participating youth gained important skills and competencies while learning more about themselves and building social capital.”

Mitra (2004)⁷ found that increasing student voice opportunities in a high school committed to involving students in their reform efforts led to “increases in youth agency, belonging, and competence.” Finally, Checkoway & Richards-Schuster (2003)⁸ found that, in part due to equalizing power relationships, youth-involved evaluation can enable young people to exercise their political rights and share in the “democratization of knowledge.”

Evidence that Youth have a Positive Impact on Organizations and Communities

To search for evidence of the positive effect that youth involvement has on organizations and communities, I began by searching databases including ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and ISI Web of knowledge (all suggested by the HSL Librarian). In ERIC, I started with the search strategy: “Youth AND Empowerment AND Community”, which yielded 268 articles. After a brief review of the keywords in several abstracts, I narrowed my search to “Youth AND Empowerment AND Community Development, and also eliminated medical research, which yielded a much more manageable 26 articles. I reviewed these abstracts, finding one review (Walker, 2007) that evaluated the effect of youth involvement in organizations. When searching the bibliography of this review, I also located other articles directly addressing the benefits for organizations and communities when youth are involved in leadership, and one seemed pertinent (London et al, 2003) and showed up in other searches.

In the Academic Search Premier database, I used the search strategy outlined above, yielding 166 articles. The two articles above appeared in this search as well. Finally, I searched the ISI Web of Knowledge database. In addition to the literature found in databases, I used some resources provided by Question Why, including an unpublished review of the impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations (Zeldin, 2000)

Shepherd Zeldin has been a pioneer in the evaluation of programs across the country that involve youth. In 2000, he published a summary of his research on the topic to date, titled, “Youth in Decision-Making: A study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and

Organizations.” This report was commissioned by the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development as well as the National 4-H council and the Youth in Governance Taskforce. Zeldin’s research group conducted focus groups with nineteen youth and twenty-nine adults from fifteen organizations across the country. He concluded that young people, through their leadership and involvement in many types of community organizations, can have a powerful and positive effect on organizations, communities, and – interestingly – on the adults involved in the organizations. This report was not published but the findings of the report were referenced in future publications^{9, 10}. YES! provided me with Zeldin’s 2000 report.

Walker’s (2007)¹¹ review of several principles for youth-involved research and evaluation echoes Zeldin, concluding that “including youth in the evaluation process can enhance the quality of the inquiry and be empowering for its participants.” She also notes, however, that the improvement that youth bring to the table with their “fresh minds” and “clear thinking” is not without challenge, and recognizes that youth and their accomplishments/impacts on organizations & communities are more difficult to evaluate than those that adults contribute. London, Zimmerman, & Erbstein (2003)¹² found that young people provide an “important and legitimizing perspective” on the programs that serve them, and, that by “enhancing the understanding and interpretation of youth experience,” youth involvement can arguably contribute to more valid and reliable findings during evaluation.

Other Programs that have used a similar Strategy of Youth-Empowerment

Though the theory of Youth Empowerment has been well defined in an academic sense, it is challenging to translate theory to action. Perhaps the best example of successful implementation of the Youth Empowerment Model as defined by YES! can be found in its flagship organization, Question Why. Question Why is a state-wide tobacco-cessation program that began in January 2001 with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and other local agencies. Three regional directors were hired. The program's activities are created by youth, for youth with an understanding that if tobacco-use problems are to end, the energy and initiative of youth is necessary¹³.

In order to find other organizations that have utilized the idea of Youth Empowerment, I first searched MedLine, using the following search: (adolescent OR youth) AND Empower* AND (infusion OR empower* OR governance OR engage* OR "decision making" OR "decision-making"). This yielded 790 articles. I searched for some seemingly relevant articles and looked at their search terms, which eventually yielded several articles on tobacco cessation and sex education that employed the idea of peer-peer education rather than more evidence-based approaches such as the traditional instructor-instructed model. There were not, however, any programs that used the idea of Youth Empowerment as YES! defines it (youth involved in leadership, decision-making, etc).

I again searched the ERIC database. After searching with several different keywords, I found some articles that 1) came up under several different permutations of "youth

empowerment”, “civic engagement”, and “community program” and 2) seemed to interpret the idea of Youth Empowerment in a way similar to YES! Additionally, I looked for programs that had been evaluated in some way so that I could consider their evaluation technique when designing one for YES!

Youth Empowerment Strategies Project¹⁴ (YES! – We’ll just call it *Strategies* for simplicity) is an after school empowerment program and research project for early adolescents. *Strategies* describes itself as an “empowerment intervention,” and provides young teens with opportunities for civic engagement with other youth around issues of shared concern in their schools and neighborhoods using “Photovoice,” a combination of photography and writing¹⁵. *Strategies* funded by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention engages youth as critical thinkers and problem solvers by challenging them to 1) document their environment with photography 2) explain in written words why their photos represent challenges or problems in their environment 3) make proposals for how to solve the problems and 4) finally, engage others in the issue they have “uncovered¹⁴.” The group of young people design social action projects in the participants’ school and neighborhood which are led by *Strategies* youth. Of 13 *Strategies* groups started in “at-risk” schools (defined by virtue of attending Title 1 public elementary schools serving low-income communities) in Southern California during the 2003-2004 school year, 12 groups were able to design and implement a social action project.

Though *Strategies* implements some of the same Youth Empowerment theory and practice as YES!, it is different in many ways. First, it targets an already-identified-at-

risk-group. YES! employs teens from all different socio-economic backgrounds. Another key difference is that YES!, as part of their youth empowerment philosophy, pays the youth involved in the program, something that Strategies could not do because of the younger age group involved in the program in the elementary school setting.

Pearrow, et al (2008)¹⁶, attempts to provide a framework for examining Youth Empowerment programs, arguing that there are six dimensions of “critical youth empowerment (CYE)” programs. She grounds her argument deeply in Empowerment theory as well as a psychological understanding of youth development. She also presents, as an example, the Teen Empowerment Program, which was implemented among high-risk youth in urban communities, and uses the six-dimensions model to evaluate it.

According to Pearrow, the six key dimensions of a successful CYE program are:

1. A welcoming and safe environment;
2. Meaningful participation and engagement;
3. Equitable power sharing between youths and adults;
4. Engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes;
5. Participation in sociopolitical processes to effect change; and
6. Integrated individual- and community-level empowerment¹⁶.

The Teen Empowerment Program (TE) in Boston, Massachusetts, historically targets urban neighborhoods with high rates of youth violence. TE selects youths to be hired as Youth Organizers, and these Youth Organizers recruit other youth to participate. All youth are hired through a process which always includes other youth. Ultimately TE

assembles groups of 8-12 youth aged 14-18 that reflects as closely as possible the cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity of the community in which it will work. The groups have equitable power sharing relationships between adult and teen members, and all work together to design “community programs” and “advocacy plans”.

The ideas and theory integral to TE are strikingly similar to YES! Pearrow uses the six principles of a CYE program to evaluate TE based on each principle, and argues that the same principles can be applied to any Youth Empowerment program, regardless of its ultimate focus, ie tobacco cessation, etc (interestingly, the “ultimate focus” of TE was not mentioned). The six dimension model could likely be applied to YES!.

Challenges

Both *Strategies* and TE have structures and a focus similar to that of YES! Unlike Question Why, *Strategies* and TE focus on the broader idea of youth empowerment (rather than focusing on just one issue) by encouraging individual skill development, developing critical awareness, and creating opportunities for youth to speak out.

Strategies even employs their youth, compensating them monetarily.

However, YES! does not focus its efforts towards at-risk youth but rather targets at-risk communities and involves all-comers in their efforts towards change. They do not draw their youth from after school programs or similar places where a power structure already exists, but makes an effort to include youth with ethnic, socioeconomic, and “situational” diversity. YES! will face a difficult, unprecedented challenge in making their program

appeal to a variety of different youth, and will rely on their staff's diversity to be effective at spreading their messages of change. Theory to practice will be a difficult task.

Summary: A Gap between theory and practice

There is substantial evidence to suggest that the involvement of young people in efforts towards community change is not only effective in change efforts, but beneficial to the development of the youth involved^{3,4,5,6}. Additionally, when youth advocate for change in their communities, the results can be positive for adults in the effort as well as beneficial on the organizational and the community level^{7,8,9}.

Unfortunately, the infrastructure surrounding potentially successful youth empowerment projects is not sufficient to support them. There are two bodies of knowledge that seem to be important in successful Youth Empowerment efforts: Public health and community organizing (or an understanding of how to engage youth in advocacy work), as well as a thorough understanding of youth development principles. Thus, there is a need for an organization that is able to grasp and utilize the benefits inherent in youth empowerment as well as package community advocacy efforts in programming that is evidence-based, sustainable, and that yields the highest benefits for both the community and the youth involved. The best example of such a program currently in operation (besides YES!) is the Teen Empowerment Program¹⁴ which is currently evaluated based on six key dimensions. With personnel trained in public health and youth development as well as knowledge of successful advocacy tactics, YES! has the infrastructure and tools to be a successful Youth Empowerment program, regardless of the "cause" it adopts.

IV. Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!) Program Plan

The program plan section will provide many of the details for the planning process and intervention plans for YES! First, the rationale and need for YES! within the communities it serves will be described, making reference to the mini-systematic review of the literature in the previous section. Program theory will then be discussed in the context of YES! Then, the context of the program within various community levels will be detailed. This will include the history of the YES! program current resources, the political and social environment in which this program will be planned and take place as well as the current priorities of YES!. Finally, the goals and objectives for YES! will be outlined and a logic model will be presented which will demonstrate the plan for implementation.

Program Theory

As discussed at length in the systematic review section, there is an ongoing need for programs like YES! that integrate ideas and theory of youth empowerment with a knowledge base that includes teen development as well as knowledge of public health interventions. Utilizing theory in program development can optimize success. There are many program theories which fit well with the implementation of YES!, both on the individual and community level.

Program Theory in Context

On an Individual level, Yes! could utilize the Stages of Change Model. In order for youth to take an active role in their communities, youth must first be ready for change themselves, as well take the initiative to learn about issues in the community which they

have a desire to change. This premise is also true for the adult trainers involved. To take this theory a step further, youth could learn about the levels of motivation for change in peer-education. For example, they may talk to a peer about tobacco cessation with a teen who is in the contemplation phase in a different way than they would talk to a peer who had already committed to quitting smoking but was having difficulty developing support networks.

On a community level, the YES! program is compatible with the community organization model. YES! aims to improve not only the individual youth and adults that work with the program, but also the community at large. Using empowerment as a tool, YES! will increase the community competency of the youth in its communities, allowing them to participate in issue selection, weighing in on what issues are relevant to them and worthy of their time and advocacy. The “critical consciousness” component of the community organization model was likely at the root of the development of the tried and true Youth Empowerment Model.

The Youth Empowerment Model

YES! staff have developed a Youth Empowerment Model that is integrated at all levels of their work: individual, organizational and community. This model emerged from youth and adult discussions of theoretical concepts of empowerment from academic research and “real world” experience with empowerment in community practice. Originally, during the development of Question Why, the idea of youth empowerment was synthesized with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) environmental approach to tobacco prevention and control to form the framework for the Youth

Empowerment model. Bringing youth into leadership and advocacy roles for creating community change around tobacco was a natural fit with an action framework of empowering youth within their own communities. The working model of youth empowerment includes three components for optimal success: Skill Development, Critical Awareness, and Opportunities. Research studies repeatedly show that youth that are actively engaged in social change have these three core components¹⁷.

- Skill Development: Acquiring critical skills, knowledge, capacity-building and/or learning for action in particular subject areas. This includes gathering information about the area of concern and enhancing the skills necessary for disseminating that information.
- Critical Awareness: Analyzing, strategizing, understanding issues and awareness of root causes, systems and strategies for change. This is also referred to as motivation or sense of responsibility. A successful critical analysis will help determine the strategic approach (e.g., advocacy, diplomacy or activism).
- Opportunities: Taking action, applying skills, generating change through sustained, relevant action. For example, meeting with school officials to create new policies, writing opinion pieces for the community newspapers, and making presentations to diverse community groups.

The Youth Empowerment Model will continue to be used as YES! develops its own objectives and plans for evaluation¹⁸.

Program Context

Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!) has their main office in Durham, NC and also has NC offices staffed in Asheville and Charlotte. There are many factors which have influenced both the program design of YES!, as well as its implementation. Perhaps the largest factor that has influenced the development of YES! is the successful history of its flagship program, Question Why. Since YES! is still trying to establish itself as a stand-alone non-profit, the challenges that YES! will face from socio-political factors can be predicted based on the Question Why experience.

History of Youth Empowered Solutions

On Jan 1, 2008, Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!) was founded and formed as a non-profit to act as an umbrella organization for the tobacco-cessation flagship organization, Question Why, and hopefully to other projects that engage youth for community decision making. With funds from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, YES! is currently developing a new project to increase physical fitness among youth called "Healthy Vessels." They plan to launch this initiative in five NC Counties over the next few months.. YES! is also starting a fee-for-service program in which youth are recruited and paid to lead trainings for various community events and organizations on subjects ranging from tobacco cessation to the positive rewards of active living.

In order to understand the framework of Youth Empowered Solutions, it is necessary to understand the history of Question Why. Question Why is a tobacco cessation program which began in 2001 with the Robert Wood Johnson "Smokeless States" Grants and

grant money from the Health and Wellness Trust Fund. Several grant recipients began to work together on a new initiative to decrease teen smoking in their communities in and around the Asheville, Charlotte, and Durham areas of North Carolina. Smoking was chosen because it was an issue that the youth felt they had high personal stakes in, and there was qualitative data from youth suggesting that tobacco use was, from their point of view, a problem in their communities. The initiative involved the integration of youth and youth empowerment as a key element towards success. Their first summit for Youth training gathered interested youth in the community and discussed issues that the youth had with smoking and smoking cessation. The questions among the youth were endless: Why are cigarettes in machines if we don't want kids to buy them? Why are they legal if smoking is as bad for you as alcohol? Why, Why, Why? Thus, Question Why was born.

Over time, some of these same youth were recruited to work on the front line towards tobacco cessation in their communities. The curriculum for Question Why workshops was developed by the program founders based on youth's questions and concerns; and youth were involved in all workshops and teaching sessions. The Question Why philosophy is unique because of the way it incorporates youth into its infrastructure - as beneficiaries and as actively involved participants in the process. Question Why has developed a three-tiered Youth Empowerment Model, mentioned previously, which is implemented in order to benefit the youth that work for Question Why, the adults who mentor them, and the communities that receive the benefits of Question Why workshops.

Currently, there are three Question Why youth teams in North Carolina (Asheville, Charlotte, Durham), each with an adult coordinator. The youth are recruited through the local High Schools; Faith-based groups, and other social networks, resulting in a diverse group of motivated youth. Youth are the members of boards and take part in decision making at every level of the ?Y process. Since its inception, Question Why has had a powerful impact on youth tobacco use in North Carolina, and has gained national attention as a leader in youth tobacco advocacy. When the Question Why program began in 2000, rates of tobacco use among high school and middle school students were 38% and 18% respectively; YTS rates for 2005 found that these numbers had dropped to 29% and 11%¹⁹.

The staff of Question Why began to realize the Youth Empowerment Model was the core element of their advocacy and social change work and that this model could and should be expanded to other health topics and civic engagement activities. Thus, Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!) was born.

YES! is now faced with the challenge of transitioning from an innovative, well-known statewide program (Question Why) to a fully-functioning nonprofit organization with multiple funding streams and diverse programs (including the already established Question Why, Healthy Vessels, and Fee for Service program). In order to make this transition, YES must form its own program plan and self-evaluation which incorporates but is not limited to its past successes.

Political and Social Environment

YES! aims to be initially implemented on a similar scale that Question Why was implemented: in the same three main regions of North Carolina (Asheville, Durham, and Charlotte areas). YES! has recently hired adult staff in these regions and others to act as support for the Healthy Vessels project and to aid in the fee-for-service project (both projects are planned to develop under the umbrella of YES!). Additionally, there are young adults who have graduated from the Question Why program and from YES! who are eager to stay involved with youth trainings. A group of Question Why and YES! alumni are quickly emerging. The grand plan is for YES! to be a non-profit which supports projects that embrace the theories of youth empowerment, including Question Why. In other words, Question Why will continue to operate as just one of many projects under the YES! umbrella

The current political environment may be beneficial for the development of YES! More young adults participated in the last national election than any other in history, with an overwhelming turn-out in North Carolina. Youth are politically engaged and ready to take action. This is just the time for an innovative program like YES! to begin. Youth are energetic, and their energy is contagious. The communities in and around Asheville, Durham, and Charlotte all had increased young voter turnout from past years. Therefore, now is likely an optimal time to implement YES!

The Activism 2000 Project, a national organization promoting maximum involvement and a consultant on the development of the ?Y program, identifies six spheres where youth demonstrate surprising power:

- peers and younger peers
- parents and family members
- principals and school administrators
- private sector (retailers, restaurants, etc.)
- press/news media (newspapers, radio and television, etc.)
- public officials, politicians, and other policy-makers

One challenge YES! may face, depending on the topics they choose to address is the adults in their own communities. Many adults are not ready for youth to take on leadership roles in their communities, especially on issues that may be more divisive than teen smoking such diet changes and safer sex. These adults may not have confidence in youth to make good decisions for themselves, much less to successfully encourage other youth to do so. Though the peer-to-peer education model has been proven to engage youth in the motivation and mobilization of their peers²⁰, some adults remain unconvinced. This could be a significant potential barrier to the Youth Empowerment Model, as the support of adults is crucial to the success of youth. However, it seems that adults were supportive of Question Why's tobacco cessation project, so they may be willing to support other endeavors as well. Adults' perspectives in the specific YES! targeted communities is not known, but efforts to assess this may a beneficial step in the early stages of the project. However, in order to circumvent this potential barrier, YES!

offers adult leader trainings to adults in their communities on the positive possibilities inherent in youth empowerment and youth-driven advocacy.

Funding

YES! is currently primarily grant funded through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund. However, in an effort to become more independently funded, YES! is expanding its fee-for-service program and also launching significant fundraising campaigns in order to diversity funding sources.. However, currently 100% of the YES! staff are fully funded by program-specific funding, some of which was originally procured through Question Why grant writing. There is a strong need to "tie" the programs of YES! together and market the pending transition from Question Why to YES!. Ideally, YES! will continue to be sustained through a variety of sources including government grants, foundation support, the fee-for-service program, and from individual and corporate donors. Potential future and continued funders include the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Triangle Community Foundation, NC Community Foundation, DoSomething.org and Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. YES! will partner with agencies to share funding, such as Action for Children NC, NC Multisite Adolescent Research Consortium (MARCH) and Children First of Buncombe County. The fee for service program serves government agencies and organizations in NC and across the country through on-site and web-based training.

Setting Priorities

As discussed in the mini-systematic review, there is a small but convincing body of literature – mostly from the “gray literature” - that supports Youth Empowerment and Peer-education models for community change. YES! aims to find ways to measure its impact on the communities in which it works and to define objectives that set YES! as a successful umbrella organization. YES! needs to evaluate its peer-education model and find ways to evaluate the youth and adult staff.

YES! Goals and Objectives

Goal: YES! will empower youth, in partnership with adults, to create community change.

Short Term Objectives (1-3 Years)

Short Term Objective 1: Reaching Youth

Within three years, Youth Empowered Solutions will reach at least 3,300 youth about health and empowerment issues.

Short Term Objective 2: Earned Media

Within three years, YES! will generate 12 new examples of earned media.

Short Term Objective 3: Adult Trainings

Within three years, Youth Empowered Solutions will engage 1,700 adults on the principles of youth empowerment and youth advocacy.

Short Term Objective 4: Fundraising

Within three years, Youth Empowered Solutions will raise a minimum of \$10,000 through fundraising.

Long Term Objectives (3-5 years)

Long Term Objective 1: Formation of Recognized non-profit

Within five years, Youth Empowered Solutions will be recognized as a high-functioning nonprofit organization.

Long Term Objective 2: Self Assessment

Within five years, Youth Empowered Solutions will develop tools to assess the quality of trainings, and youth-led, adult-assisted workshops

Long Term Objective 3: Sustainability

Within five years, Youth Empowered Solutions will develop a long-term sustainability plan.

YES! Logic Model

Resources/Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short & Long Term Outcomes	Impact
In order to accomplish our set of activities we will need the following:	In order to address our problem or asset we will conduct the following activities:	We expect that once completed or underway these activities will produce the following evidence of service delivery	We expect that if completed or ongoing these activities will lead to the following changes in 1-3 then 4-6 years	We expect that if completed these activities will lead to the following community changes in 7-10 years:
<p>Local youth groups</p> <p>Individual youth who have a desire to be leaders</p> <p>Adult YES! Personnel (Executive director, regional directors, other administrators)</p> <p>Adult program-leaders</p> <p>State-level advocacy groups</p> <p>Funding from RWJ, CDC, and NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund</p> <p>Qualitative data from youth on what issues are important to them in their communities</p>	<p>Develop critical awareness among youth (educate, listen, learn)</p> <p>Promote skill development (running workshops, advocating to public officers, public speaking)</p> <p>Create opportunities for youth to participate in community change (workshops, letter-writing, etc.)</p> <p>Educate and Activate Community:</p> <p>Recruit & train youth employees</p> <p>Recruit & train adult volunteers</p> <p>Meet with business and community policy makers to</p>	<p># of trainings for youth</p> <p>#of trainings for adult YES! leaders</p> <p># of assessment activities</p> <p># of advocacy activities</p> <p># of educational presentations to youth</p> <p># of people at YES! events</p> <p># of media relationships developed</p> <p># of meetings with community leaders</p>	<p>Many allies in policy and media: -media coverage -media campaigns</p> <p>YES! youth groups representing diverse communities</p> <p>Youth who are educated about policy and community change</p> <p>Youth are involved in YES! events</p> <p>Increased participation in YES! events (YES! reaches more people)</p> <p>Adults participate in youth-led events</p> <p>Community support for youth who desire community involvement</p> <p>6 ongoing prevention programs promoted and staffed by YES!</p>	<p>Youth more politically active in communities.</p> <p>Communities have confidence in youth.</p> <p>Policy change on issues that youth think are important on the community, state, and national level.</p> <p>The overall health of youth improves</p>

	<p>make them aware of issues that concern youth</p> <p>Advocate for new programs & policies (letters to media, policy makers, and other community leaders)</p>			
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Implementation Plan

The following strategy, elaborating on the program goal, objectives and logic model, will be utilized to achieve *empowering youth, in partnership with adults, to create community change.*

Short Term Objectives (1-3 Years)

Short Term Objective 1: Reaching Youth

Within three years, Youth Empowered Solutions will reach at least 3,300 youth about health and empowerment issues including tobacco cessation, remaining physically active, diet change, and other issues relating to the health of youth in YES! through trainings and workshops. . In order to expand the number of youth YES! reaches, the organization will hire youth in more communities. This will involve current YES! staff, including youth staff, as well as adult volunteers.

Short Term Objective 2: Earned Media

Within three years, YES! will generate 12 new examples of earned media including but not limited to youth-empowerment oriented pro-health media alerts, letters to the editor, blogs, and news stories. YES! youth will spend time becoming educated on these strategies. They will also need to develop skills to help them effectively tell others about their views; these skills will also include letter writing (to policy makers and community leaders) and public speaking.

Short Term Objective 3: Adult Trainings

Within three years, Youth Empowered Solutions will engage 1,700 adults on the principles of youth empowerment and youth advocacy. These adults will need to endorse the ideas and philosophies of youth empowerment and be willing to volunteer at YES! events in their communities. To accomplish this, youth employees will educate adults with whom they come in direct contact including parents, teachers, and youth leaders

Short Term Objective 4: Fundraising

Within three years, Youth Empowered Solutions will raise a minimum of \$10,000 through fundraising. This will be accomplished primarily through the fee-for service program that is currently being refined by YES!. The fee for service program will allow YES! youth to be hired as peer educators by community groups such as church groups and youth summits. There will also be other fundraising strategies in place

Long Term Objectives (3-5 years)

LongTerm Objective 1: Formation of Recognized non-profit

Within five years, Youth Empowered Solutions will be recognized as a high-functioning nonprofit. All YES! staff will work together to increase the visibility of YES! in North Carolina communities (using strategies mentioned in short term objectives). As a high-functioning non-profit, YES! will have more leverage to obtain more grant funding and support from other outside sources.

Long Term Objective 2: Self Assessment

Within five years, Youth Empowered Solutions will develop tools to assess the quality of trainings, and youth-led, adult-assisted workshops. There will also be a process evaluation. The program evaluation portion of this paper can serve as a jumping-off point, and YES! will allocate funds to carry out evaluation activities outlined in the program evaluation plan.

Long Term Objective 3: Sustainability

Within five years, Youth Empowered Solutions will develop a long-term sustainability plan to produce 40% of their funding internally, using resources such as the fee-for-service program.

V. Youth Empowered Solutions Evaluation Plan

Overview

The evaluation of program planning, implementation and outcomes is a critical component of the program planning process. Through the evaluation process, planners and stakeholders are provided with both qualitative and quantitative measures of a program's performance. These measures may then be incorporated into planning improvements. Additional benefits of evaluation include the collection and dissemination of data for future funding requests, for participant recruitment and for application and adaptation by planners in different settings and contexts.

Evaluation Objectives

There are several reasons to evaluate the program plan for YES! First and foremost, evaluation is needed to monitor progress towards the goals and objectives outlined by YES! Using the logic model as a guide, the evaluation should determine whether certain program components are producing the desired progress on outcomes. In the context of YES, evaluation is important in order to justify the need for further funding and support and to find opportunities for continuous quality improvement. Similarly, evaluation is essential to make sure that the limited resources available to YES! are being used in the most efficient way.

The program evaluation for YES! is important for several reasons. First, YES! needs a plan for evaluation in order to ensure future funding through grants and other funding

sources. Additionally, an effective evaluation of YES! will provide the organization with the credibility to extend its services to more sites in similar community settings, much like Question Why? accomplished with tobacco cessation. Finally, evaluation of YES! will enable the organization to assess the use of youth empowerment as an instrument of community change and to strengthen its overall contribution as a non-profit.

Role of the Evaluator

Good evaluation of any organization can rarely be carried out by a single person²¹. I do not anticipate being highly interactive in the evaluation process, but another external evaluator will likely best serve the purpose of evaluation in conjunction with the YES! staff. The YES! staff will be very interested and enthusiastic in taking on an active role in carrying out the components of this evaluation, making it ultimately a participatory evaluation. The executive director of YES! is trained in public health and in advocacy and will be an essential component to the continued participatory evaluation of YES!

Skills Needed for Effective Evaluation

Key skills of any program evaluator are many. In order to be an effective evaluator of YES! or any other program, an evaluator must not only be skilled in evaluation and research methods, but be flexible and have problem solving abilities. Most importantly, the evaluator must be able to listen to many different perspectives and bring them together to produce a final product that will be useful to YES!²²

The Role of Stakeholders

Several stakeholders must be involved during the YES! evaluation process. Current funders of YES!, including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, would naturally be interested in a formal evaluation plan for one of its large grantees. Additionally, agencies that work closely with YES!, such as local youth groups and after school programs, would likely be good sources of input during the evaluation. Since YES! relies on community members – both youth and adult – to staff their program, these community members should be involved in the evaluation process as well. Other staff will also be crucial stakeholders in YES! evaluation.*

Challenges

It will be challenging to balance the interests of the various YES! stakeholders during evaluation. The staff – youth and adult – will be easy to engage and likely a great source of feedback and manpower. Youth groups and other community organizations may have less time to take part in the evaluation, but they believe in the mission of YES! and will likely take time to participate. Funders may be more difficult to involve in the process. All these factors should be considered as an evaluation plan for YES! is developed.

Study Design

This intervention is quasi-interventional; randomization of groups is not possible. The intervention, for example, a YES! training session for youth, could be measured by surveying the youth who participate in them as learners (vs the youth that teach them). Pre/post assessments can be employed if no two distinct groups can be identified, such as

asking youth or adults whether their values/ideas changed as a result of the intervention. This evaluation cannot have a control group, ie, a group of youth that did NOT receive the benefit of the YES! trainings, because any way of selecting this group would be biased. Thus, this intervention is observational and quasi-experimental (pre/post assessment). Two study designs will be used at different parts in the intervention.

One of the most important outcomes of the YES! intervention is the effect on the lives of youth who are involved in YES! as YES! leaders/teachers. The goal is for these youth to become empowered to speak out in their communities, thus strengthening their own sense of self as well as improving the communities and people around them. Thus, the primary “group” are the youth and a much more distant group is the communities in which they work. In short, in this program evaluation we are asking multiple questions and will have multiple designs to address these questions, among them descriptive and observational designs as well as the aforementioned pre/post assessment.

Methods

Regardless of study design, effective evaluation questions can be asked to measure each objective, in most cases determining a relationship between that certain objective and a desired outcome. Some of the objectives involve very quantitative methods of measurement (like fundraising, or number of people doing X activity) while others will require much more qualitative measures such as interviews, surveys, or secondary data.

I plan on using surveys, both open-ended and succinct as a method of self-report.

Standardized surveys may be appropriate in some instances, such as at the end of a YES! training session. Observation to determine competency will be important as well.

Additionally, I plan to use check-lists, YES! document review (activity logs, organizational records, and satisfaction surveys). Focus groups with YES! staff – youth, volunteering adults, paid executive directors – and community members will help determine if there are needs not being met by current program policies or interventions. Pre- and post- test knowledge assessment will be needed to gauge whether certain youth trainings are effective.

Overall, this evaluation will use a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to measure the extent to which each evaluation question is measured.

VI. Discussion

There is substantial evidence to suggest that the involvement of young people in efforts towards community change is not only effective in change efforts, but beneficial to the development of the youth involved^{3,4,5,6}. Additionally, when youth advocate for change in their communities, the results can be positive for adults in the effort as well as beneficial on the organizational and the community level^{7,8,9}.

Unfortunately, the infrastructure surrounding potentially successful youth empowerment projects is not always sufficient to support them. There are two bodies of knowledge that seem to be important in successful Youth Empowerment efforts: Public health and community organizing (or an understanding of how to engage youth in advocacy work), as well as a thorough understanding of youth development principles. Thus, there is a need for an organization that is able to grasp and utilize the benefits inherent in youth empowerment as well as package community advocacy efforts in programming that is evidence-based, sustainable, and yields the highest benefits for both the community and the youth involved. The best example of such a program currently in operation (besides YES!) is the Teen Empowerment Program¹⁴ which is currently evaluated on six key dimensions. With personnel trained in public health and youth development as well as knowledge of successful advocacy tactics, YES! has the infrastructure and tools to be a successful Youth Empowerment program, regardless of the “cause” it adopts.

*In the future, there will ideally be dedicated funds to complete a formal evaluation of YES!

VII. Acknowledgements

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VIII. Appendices & References

Appendix 1: Evaluation Tables

Appendix 2: YES! Fact Sheet (2008

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Short Term Objective 1: Reaching Youth

Within three years, Youth Empowered Solutions will reach at least 3,300 youth about health and empowerment issues.

Evaluation Question	Participant(s)	Method
How many youth were reached in the target population by the goal time? What methods did YES! use to recruit youth to participate in YES!? If YES! did not recruit, how did youth find out about YES! services?	YES! youth Community youth YES! Program Directors	Checklists Open-ended Interviews Surveys
What activities were delivered to youth in what communities?	YES! youth Community youth YES! Program Directors	Activity logs Open-ended interviews
Were the youth who participated in YES! positively effected? Were participants in yes activities satisfied with their experience?	YES! youth Community youth	Open-ended interviews
Did YES! youth gain the competencies outlined by YES!? Were behavior changes seen?	YES! youth YES! Program Directors	Pre and post test knowledge Open-ended interviews Document review
How did YES! involvement effect the lives of youth at the individual level? Was there a change in behavior among these youth? Were their career/school choices changed as a result of yes?	YES! youth YES! Program Directors	Document review Open-ended interview
What aspects of the youth trainings were felt to work particularly well and why?	YES! youth Community youth YES! Program Directors	Focus groups Open-ended interviews surveys

Short Term Objective 3: Adult Trainings

Within three years, Youth Empowered Solutions will engage 1,700 adults on the principles of youth empowerment and youth advocacy.

Evaluation Question	Participant(s)	Method
How many adult participants were trained? How many adults were “engaged” on the principles of youth empowerment and advocacy? What does “engaged” mean in this context?	YES! Program Directors Adult staff (participants) Adult training staff	Checklists Open-ended interviews Surveys
How were the adults engaged? What methods were used to engage the adults?	Adult staff (participants) Adult training staff	Open-ended interviews
At the completion of the adults’ involvement, did the adults feel that they had gained the resources and knowledge to participate in youth empowerment and advocacy activities?	Adult staff (participants) Adult training staff	Open-ended interviews Surveys Pre and post test knowledge
How many staff participated in the adult trainings? Did the staff feel the adult trainings went well? Why or why not?	Adult training staff Adult staff (participants)	Activity logs Open-ended interviews
Did the adults who were trained and went on to work with YES! feel that they positively impacted the youth with whom they worked?	Adult staff (participants)	Open-ended interviews

Short Term Objective 4: Fundraising

Within three years, Youth Empowered Solutions will raise a minimum of \$10,000 through fundraising.

Evaluation Question	Participant(s)	Method
How much money was raised by the goal date? Did this reach the goal? Why or why not? What barriers were met in the fundraising process?	YES! Program Directors	Document review Open-ended interviews
How was the money raised?	YES! Program Directors	Document review Open-ended interviews
Why were these fundraising techniques selected? What were other options? How can this process be improved?	YES! Program Directors	Open-ended interviews
Who was in charge of fundraising? How was this person/group selected? What process was used to select the person/group?	YES! Program Directors	Open-ended interviews Document review
What were unanticipated barriers in fund procurement? How were they dealt with?	YES! Program Directors	Open-ended interviews

LongTerm Objective 1: Formation of Recognized non-profit

Within five years, Youth Empowered Solutions will be recognized as a high-functioning nonprofit organization.

Evaluation Question	Participant(s)	Method
Was YES! established as a non-profit by the goal date? Are the values that YES! ascribes to have represented by this non-profit accurately?	YES! Program Directors Community organizations YES! Youth Staff	Document Review Open-ended Interviews
Were there any barriers confronted in the formation of the non-profit? How were they overcome?	YES! Program Directors	Open-ended Interviews
Who was affected by YES!, as in, which community organizations or groups within the community benefited?	YES! Program Directors Community organizations	Open-ended Interviews Surveys (possibly)
How has YES! positively impacted the community? Did the attitudes and beliefs of community groups and other people in the community change as a result of YES!	YES! Program Directors Community organizations Yes! Youth Staff	Open-ended Interviews
Did you confront any barriers as YES! became a recognized non-profit that were unanticipated? How were they overcome?	YES! Program Directors	Open-ended Interviews

Long Term Objective 2: Self Assessment

Within five years, Youth Empowered Solutions will develop tools to assess the quality of trainings, and youth-led, adult-assisted workshops

Evaluation Question	Participant(s)	Method
Were evaluation tools developed? What kind? Why were these tools developed over others?	YES! Program Directors	Open-ended Interviews Document Review
What resources were used to develop evaluation tools?	YES! Program Directors	Document Review Open-ended Interviews
Do the evaluation tools seem to be effective at assessing desired measures within YES!?	YES! Program Directors	Open-ended Interviews
Who administers evaluations? How were these evaluators chosen? Why?	YES! Program Directors	Open-ended Interviews Document Review

Long Term Objective 3: Sustainability

Within five years, Youth Empowered Solutions will develop a long-term sustainability plan.

Evaluation Question	Participant(s)	Method
Was a sustainability plan developed? How was the plan developed? What resources were used to develop the plan?	YES! Program Directors	Document Review Open-ended Interviews
What percent of funding is currently produced by the fee-for-service program?	YES! Program Directors	Document Review
How has the fee-for service program expanded? What measures were taken to ensure this expansion? Were unanticipated barriers met during this process?	YES! Program Directors	Document review Open-ended Interviews
What aspects of the fee-for-service program seem to work particularly well and why?	YES! Program Directors	Open-ended Interviews
What changes were made to make the fee-for service program expand? Why did you select these changes and discard other options?	YES! Program Directors	Open-ended Interviews



Mission:

YES! empowers youth, in partnership with adults, to create community change.

Values:

- We believe well-trained, empowered youth benefit from and add value to any organization promoting social change.
- We believe intergenerational power sharing is essential to creating solutions for the challenges of our world.
- We believe talent in a variety of forms should be respected and honored.
- We believe providing a safe place for youth and adults to be themselves is essential.
- We believe supporting and encouraging youth engagement within our organization is an integral part of what is necessary for communities to be healthy.

Summary

Empowerment is the foundation of Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!). Youth empowerment refers to the process of helping young people to critically analyze, develop skills, and act to improve their communities. In this organization, young people are the creators, designers, messengers, advocates, and evaluators. They become leaders who exert influence to positively impact the lives of youth and other citizens within their community.

Goals

YES! provides training, technical assistance and resources to youth, adults, and organizations that develop young leaders to create positive change within their communities. **YES!** ...

- ! Provides youth-led trainings for youth focusing on skills and critical awareness
- ! Maintains a core of highly trained and paid youth staff that serve as peer educators and consultants on youth issues
- ! Trains adults who work with youth on empowerment, specialized health topics, advocacy and social change
- ! Maintains a database of culturally appropriate resources for dissemination that will focus on youth empowerment and advocacy
- ! Establishes working partnerships with youth serving organizations in order to replicate the youth empowerment model and provide technical assistance

The Future of YES!

YES! has gained experience and success from its flagship program, Question Why (?Y). The ?Y program has had a powerful impact on youth tobacco use in NC since 2001 and has gained national attention as a leader in youth tobacco advocacy. **YES!** will apply the same successful model of youth empowerment to transform skills to civic action in areas that are of importance to young people. **YES!** wants to ensure that young people can be present and serve responsibly in shaping their own future.